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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 003522

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [IZ](#)

SUBJECT: PRT ANBAR: ANBARIS HOST YET ANOTHER SUNNI-SHI'A
EVENT

REF: A) BAGHDAD 3366 B) BAGHDAD 3451

Classified By: PRT Team Leader James Soriano for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)
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[1](#)1. (U) This is a PRT Anbar/Karbala joint reporting cable.

[1](#)2. (C) Summary: Anbar Governor Ma'amoun and Karbala Governor Aqeel al-Kahazali met at the Ramadi residence of Sheikh Ahmed Abu Risha, head of the Iraq Awakening Movement (SAI), on October 20 along with 80 tribal sheikhs from their respective provinces, to foster Sunni-Shi'a reconciliation. Earlier in the day, Ma'amoun and Provincial Council Chairman Abdulsalam Abdullah met with Aqeel and four Karbala Sheikhs in his office in downtown Ramadi prior to adjourning to the plenary session at Sheikh Ahmed,s residence. In their public remarks at the plenary session, both Aqeel and Ma'amoun discussed national unity. The Karbala sheikhs encouraged Governor Aqeel to invite the Anbar sheikhs to Karbala in the future. Governor Ma'amoun told us that his motivation for holding the gathering in Anbar was to strengthen the province,s tribal movement and the Anbar Tribal Awakening -- not necessarily the Iraqi Awakening Movement (SAI). End Summary.

DISPLAYS OF UNITY

[1](#)3. (C) Anbar Governor Ma'amoun and Karbala Governor Aqeel met at the Ramadi residence of Sheikh Ahmed Abu Risha, head of the SAI, on October 20 along with 80 tribal sheikhs from their respective provinces to build Sunni-Shi'a reconciliation. The four-hour meeting was originally planned as a follow-up to the July meeting between the two governors at REO Hillah, with the aim of giving structure to a proposed joint coordinating committee, but Ma'amoun changed tack and opted instead for a broader reconciliation meeting among the tribal leaders. The event was the third such gathering of Anbar and Karbala sheikhs in two weeks, this time organized by the two Governors.

ONE IRAQ FROM BASRAH TO MOSUL

[1](#)4. (C) Earlier in the day, Ma'amoun and Provincial Council Chairman Abdulsalam Abdullah met with Aqeel and four Karbala Sheikhs in his office in downtown Ramadi prior to adjourning to the plenary session at Sheikh Ahmed,s residence. Ma'amoun warmly welcomed his guests, emphasizing the strong bond between Karbala and Anbar. The Karbala sheikhs replied, "We are all interested in one Iraq from Basrah to Mosul. We will support each other. We are all brothers."

[1](#)5. (C) In their public remarks at the plenary session, both Aqeel and Ma'amoun keyed on themes of national unity. Aqeel warned against those who breed sectarianism. He also described Karbala and Anbar as the main axis of Iraq,s stability. Ma'amoun praised the role played by Anbari

tribal leaders in bringing stability to their province, adding that the SAI is part of a larger movement. His comment was noteworthy in that he drew a distinction between the province,s "tribal awakening" in general, and the more prominent role played by the SAI. Ma,amoun also thanked Sheikh Ahmed for allowing the event to be held at the Abu Risha compound, emphasizing Ahmed,s role as leader of the Abu Risha tribe, not as the leader of SAI.

DIFFERENT ACCENT

¶6. (C) Two police officers guarding the plenary session told a by-stander that Shi,a leaders have recently become a common sight at Sheikh Ahmed,s house. One of them praised the reconciliation efforts declaring: "We are one people -- we have one blood, one God and one prophet." The other officer said that he rarely met people from Karbala previously, commenting "I see they have a different accent, but they border Anbar and do not live that far away. So it is good if they visit us."

¶7. (C) Former Governor Sheikh Ali Kamona told Karbala Team Leader that this was his first visit to Anbar and he is impressed by the sincerity and welcome from the Anbar sheikhs. In his words, all of the people were "compassionate," but were waiting for the first step to be taken. After he returned to Karbala, he was contacted by many people including some political figures from Baghdad, who said they wished they participated. After the group returned to Karbala, the sheikhs encouraged Governor Aqeel to invite the Anbar sheikhs to Karbala. Governor Aqeel responded he has formally invited them. The sheikhs expressed their willingness to host the next meeting. (Note:

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the Karbala sheikhs appear to want to establish a tribal council and want to maintain communication with the Anbar sheikhs. End Note.)

COMMENT

¶8. (C) Unlike the meeting in July, the timing and organization of the meeting was the decision of the two Governors. Governor Aqeel was privately effusive in his thanks to BG Cardon and the PRT for their support. The event was heavily covered in the local and national media. It was Governor Ma,amoun,s decision to change the meeting,s format from a working bi-lateral between provincial officials to a broader Sunni-Shi'a reconciliation gathering, as well as to ask Sheikh Ahmed to host the plenary session at his residence. He told us that his motivation in doing so was to strengthen Anbar,s tribal movement and the Anbar Tribal Awakening -- not necessarily SAI itself, which he harbors some skepticism. Both Ma,amoun and Sheikh Ahmed are in a group of eight Anbari notables who will travel to the US to participate in an International Visitors Program beginning in Washington on Oct. 29. Seven of the eight IV delegates were present at the meeting with the Karbala sheikhs.

¶9. (U) This cable was coordinated with PRT Karbala.
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